



State of the State Address

By

Governor Mel Carnahan

January 17, 1996

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro Tem, distinguished state officials, members of the 88th General Assembly, and citizens of Missouri:

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today.

One of the greatest rewards of being governor is meeting so many remarkable people who share their dreams with you.

As you know, I particularly enjoy meeting young people because of their boundless energy and enthusiasm, and their refreshing views on life.

Last June, I received a very special letter from one young person inviting me to "do" lunch.

I say this invitation was very special because this wasn't just any lunch.

This was a lunch to celebrate Kendra Davis's tenth birthday, and Kendra — who lives in Osage Beach — wanted to have lunch with me in my office.

She even wrote that if I agreed, then I would be "extra excellent."



How could I refuse her request ... and this chance to be “extra excellent?”

So Kendra and I had her birthday celebration in my office.

We had chicken fingers, soda, and, of course, a chocolate cake with candles.

I had looked forward to visiting with Kendra and expected a conversation about school, her friends, and maybe her favorite games or television shows.

Well, I was certainly mistaken.

Kendra opened the conversation by asking me my views on Bosnia and smoking.

We discussed the quality of education, the future of our state and nation, and even the quality of our roads.

At ten years of age, Kendra Davis was already focused on the future...not just her future, but our future.

She believes that she can make a difference in this world, and she is expecting us to make a difference as well.

Kendra and her family are here today, sitting with my wife Jean.

I asked her to come, because — at least to me — she serves as a wonderful reminder of the most important reason we are here: to make Missouri a safer and better place for our most precious resource — our children and grandchildren...the youngest citizens of Missouri.

You can bet she’s going to hold us accountable.

Kendra’s counting on us...to do the right thing for Missouri.

And so are all the other young people of our state.

They are watching to make sure we do what we were sent here to accomplish...to keep Missourians safe from crime, to make sure our schools offer a quality education, and to make certain there are enough good jobs to provide our families with a reasonable level of financial security.

So let us take this opportunity to review how far we have come and where we need to go.

Many good things are happening in Missouri, but there are also some areas where we still have improvements to make.

CRIME

Probably the most serious threat to providing the quality of life we want for all Missourians is violent crime.

Our homes, our neighborhoods, our businesses, and our schools will never breathe freely as long as they are constricted by fear.

As long as I am governor, we will not be content until our students can go to school unafraid.

We will not rest until our children can play in their neighborhoods without the threat of violence.



And we will not stop until our citizens can live and work without fear.

Over the past three years, we have passed some of the toughest anti-crime laws in the country.

We passed one of the nation's toughest "truth in sentencing" laws.

Now, dangerous and violent criminals must serve at least 85 percent of their sentences behind bars — far more than they were serving before this change.

I don't know if you noticed, but a story ran in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch several weeks ago about a man named Edward Post who killed his wife in 1986 and finally pleaded guilty to second degree murder.

The story went on to say that Post will be eligible for parole in 1999, after serving just ten years of a 30 year sentence.

I — along with many other Missourians — was outraged.

Ten years for someone who murdered his wife is not enough.

And serving just one-third of his sentence for murder does not serve the interests of justice.

But since Post committed his crime in 1986, his case fell under the old law which allowed such lenient treatment for murder.

This injustice won't happen again under our new sentencing law.

If Post had committed his crime today and received a 30 year sentence, he would not be eligible for parole under any circumstances until he had at least served 25 years and six months of his 30 year sentence behind bars.

Ten years is definitely too short a sentence — 25 years before parole can ever be considered is a step in the right direction.

To combat the increasing occurrence of juvenile violence, we have overhauled our juvenile crime law to hold these young offenders accountable for their actions.

Dangerous juveniles no longer have a "Get Out Of Jail Free" card in Missouri when they turn 18.

Now the most dangerous and violent juvenile offenders can be tried as adults and sent to prison (even for life, if that's appropriate) instead of being returned to the streets where they can strike again.

We have expanded the number of law enforcement officers on duty and given them the newest and most sophisticated tools to bring criminals to justice.

We've given prosecutors tough new tools to get convictions against child molesters and rapists.

We have increased the number of prison cells to ensure that violent criminals serve their time.

And we have set things straight on how criminals will spend their time in prison.



Under our new laws, all inmates must work, get a basic education, and get treatment.

We're not going to let them sit idly in their cells.

They're going to use their time working and developing job skills.

These changes are real, and they're needed.

But the war against crime continues to rage on, and so this year I am proposing an arsenal of new weapons against violent crime.

Regrettably, one of the battle zones in this war is our schools.

Too many classrooms are caught in the crossfire.

We can't expect our students and our teachers to be able to focus fully on reading, or writing, or math, when, by necessity, their greatest concern must be on protecting themselves against the possibility of violence.

Too many of our students and teachers must step into a combat zone of guns, gangs, and drugs whenever they enter the classroom.

We're not going to tolerate violent and disruptive students — period.

The Safe Schools initiative I have recently announced will give our schools the force of law and the resources they need to make our schools safer for students who are serious about getting an education.

Among these important changes, we will guarantee schools the access to juvenile records of students who have broken the law.

We will require that disciplinary records for violent students follow them if they change schools.

And my plan also includes helping school districts establish alternative schools for violent, abusive, and disruptive students.

These alternative schools will make our regular classrooms a safer and better learning environment.

And it also ensures that these troubled youth will get the help they need.

This alternative education will provide these dangerous and abusive young people with the educational, social, and behavioral skills necessary to turn their lives around.

An even more deplorable situation than being threatened at school is being threatened at home.

Countless cases of domestic violence against spouses and children go unreported each year because the victims believe they have no place to go and no one to turn to.

This year, I am calling for increased support for domestic violence shelters and other help for domestic violence victims.

These victims need our help to escape from this horrible abuse.



And I am proposing tough new sentencing and life-time supervision requirements for sexual predators, who rob their victims of their self respect.

My proposal eliminates the possibility of probation for dangerous sexual offenders.

And it requires that, if and when a sexual predator does get out of prison, he will be kept under supervision for the rest of his life.

This will allow us to return him to prison at any time if he commits another crime or violates the conditions of his release.

In addition, I am proposing legislation that will allow judges and juries to give life imprisonment to those convicted of child abuse when the result of that abuse is the death of the child.

Missouri is drawing the line on violent crime, and the message from this building today is that anyone who dares to cross that line better be prepared to pay and pay dearly.

CHILD HEALTH CARE

Another challenge before us is to improve our children's health.

Despite recent efforts, Missouri ranks 49th in the nation in childhood immunization rates.

This is not acceptable.

Immunizations are the most powerful and cost-effective way to prevent nine infectious diseases in children, including polio and measles.

Not only do children and their families benefit from these voluntary immunizations, everyone benefits by avoiding the cost of treating these preventable diseases.

Our failure to achieve adequate immunization rates is not simply an embarrassment for Missouri; it jeopardizes the health and lives of our children.

To address this critical problem, I am directing the Missouri Department of Health to implement a plan that will make it easier for all families to have their children immunized.

The plan sets a goal of having 90% of the two-year-olds in Missouri fully immunized by September 1997.

To reach this goal, I am calling for legislation that will allow parents to authorize grandparents, adult siblings, or other designated individuals to take children to be vaccinated.

And I am calling for legislation requiring that all health insurance plans that provide coverage to children include childhood immunizations without requiring the family to pay deductibles or co-payments.

Quite simply, good preventive health care makes good sense, and voluntary immunizations are an integral part of that good, preventive treatment.



Another highly effective way to help safeguard the health of our children is to expand the availability of school nurses.

My budget proposal increases grants to local schools for basic health services and screenings.

With the addition of these grants and other related state initiatives, every school district will be able to have a school nurse or other necessary health services for its students.

HELPING CHILDREN

The school nurse program and childhood immunizations are just two examples of the ways our children are counting on us to help them get off to a good start, particularly in the areas of health, mental health, and protection from abuse.

This budget accepts that challenge by providing help for some of the state's most vulnerable children.

This budget provides funds for more foster care placements for abused and neglected children.

It expands the number of child advocacy centers that serve as safe havens and assessment centers for abused children, establishing new centers in Springfield, Columbia, and Southeast Missouri.

And it provides additional residential placements for severely disturbed children and respite support for families shouldering the care of mentally ill children.

EDUCATION

And now, I would like to turn to a subject that is a recurring theme in my administration — the education of our young people.

Our young people are counting on us to provide them with a quality education.

Together, we have laid the foundation for schools that will prepare our students for the next century.

With the education reforms we initiated three years ago, we are doing a better job of giving students the education and training they need to be ready to compete in the 21st century.

As you travel around Missouri, you can already see tangible improvements in our classrooms — smaller class sizes for our first, second, and third graders; more computers; and up-to-date vocational education.

Through increased funding of our Parents As Teachers Program, early childhood education is now available to over 160,000 Missouri families.

This year we will achieve full funding of the new, more equitable school foundation formula.

The dollars needed to reach full funding are made possible in part by the savings we achieved in the Kansas City desegregation case — the first reduction in the on-going costs of desegregation in Missouri history.



For the first time, desegregation savings are being deposited into the school foundation formula and distributed to schools all across Missouri.

Our young people need to be ready for the new information economy of the next century.

This year, I am proposing another initiative to help our schools use the latest technology to improve learning.

My budget includes a \$20 million investment to help schools acquire computers and new information technologies.

Schools will be able to link up to the information super-highway and enhance interactive instruction.

These funds will be available on a matching basis to help accelerate the placement of computer technology in our schools.

Let's face it, if our children do not leave school computer literate, then their opportunities for good jobs and good careers in the years ahead will be greatly diminished.

HIGHER EDUCATION

We must not underestimate the importance of higher education to our economic growth.

The need for higher education has increased dramatically as the economy switches from an industrial base to an information base.

My budget provides a sizable investment to ensure our colleges and universities graduate well-prepared students who will be successful in the global economy.

It gives increased support to Missouri's community colleges which are providing education and customized training.

Community colleges give our students the skills necessary for high paying jobs or the coursework credits to transfer to four-year institutions.

And my budget provides increases in on-going support for our public four-year colleges and universities, and added one-time dollars for significant capital improvements.

In addition to their immediate contributions to Missouri's work force and economy, our universities are important research institutions.

I am recommending additional one-time state funds to be matched with private and University of Missouri funds for the University's Endowed Chairs program.

Since we began this partnership with the University, 16 professorships and seven endowed chairs have been established.

These endowed chairs help Missouri recruit outstanding researchers and scholars to our campuses.

Finally, my higher education budget includes a fifteen percent increase in the Missouri Student Grant program and increases in other student financial aid programs.

We want to help Missouri families and students realize the dream, and the necessity, of gaining a higher education.



SENIOR CITIZENS

Our young people are certainly the hope of tomorrow, and we must help them get off to a good start.

But we also must not neglect those who have worked to make this state the great place we enjoy today.

I strongly believe the federal government must balance its budget.

But I am troubled by some of the proposals I have heard coming out of Washington, especially those which adversely affect our senior citizens.

In Missouri, we must remain committed to helping our senior citizens live with dignity.

This year, I am proposing an initiative designed to help Missouri's seniors remain healthy and independent.

First, I am renewing my call for a tax cut for families which shoulder the cost of caring for an elderly parent.

Specifically, I propose increasing the exemption for dependents over the age of 65 from \$400 to \$2,000.

This is modest tax relief, but those caring for elderly parents need it and deserve it.

Secondly, I am proposing to expand proven, cost-effective services that help senior citizens remain in their homes and communities instead of having to move to more costly nursing homes.

These include:

- training and respite services for family members and others who provide care to seniors;
- crisis prevention services that help seniors avoid the necessity of entering a nursing home due to unforeseen, one-time circumstances;
- and meals on wheels, which has permitted so many senior citizens to continue living independently in their homes.

This new assistance for Missouri's senior citizens is not just good for seniors; it makes good economic sense for Missouri taxpayers as well.

Our seniors have given each of us — individually and as a society — more than we can ever repay.

So, as Washington considers what its commitment to the elderly will be, I want them to know that Missouri's commitment will remain strong.

STRONG ECONOMY

Our commitment to jobs and economic growth must also remain strong.

When I first assumed office, our economy was not living up to its expectations.

Today, we are outpacing the nation.

In the past year alone, the number of jobs in Missouri has grown 4.6 percent — compared to just 1.4 percent for the nation.



And, over 230 companies either located or expanded operations here last year alone, pumping more than one billion dollars in new investments into our state.

Overall, we gained about 112,000 new jobs during our last budget year.

As a result, Missouri's current unemployment rate is lower today than at any time during the past twenty years.

It stands at just 3.2 percent — much lower than the national rate.

And growth in personal income for Missourians is far surpassing the nation.

It seems clear that Missouri has indeed become a good place to do business and a good place to earn a living.

While this is good news for most of us, we must remember there are still Missourians out there who can't find work.

We must continue this progress, create more good jobs, and invest in training so that everyone who wants to work can find a job in Missouri.

If our strong economy is to continue, we must pay particular attention to our transportation needs.

After all, Missouri lies at the heart of this nation's commerce.

Our road, port, airport, rail, urban, and rural transit systems are vital parts of our commerce and every day life.

We are already a huge exporter and the starting point for billions of dollars in international trade.

Our favorable geographic location gives us a tremendous economic edge.

We have a good start on placing each piece of the transportation puzzle together.

But it is essential that we develop an effective, well-planned strategy to make the most of our transportation resources, ensure that they are coordinated, and identify any improvements that need to be made.

That is why I will be appointing a special Total Transportation Commission with representation from across the state.

This commission will evaluate our transportation needs and examine how our sources of transportation should be integrated as well as how our transportation financial resources should be distributed over the next decade.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND TAX CUTS

One reason for our economic success has been our tradition of fiscal responsibility.

This year, we should be proud that Financial World, one of the nation's most-respected business publications,



ranked Missouri as the third best managed state in the nation.

Financial World cited our “excellent long-range planning,” our “conservative accounting and budgeting,” and our “results-oriented approach” as reasons for awarding Missouri this honor.

The publication also praised our innovative budget process, which demands that each year, we go back and review previous spending to determine which programs work and which should be cut.

This year, after extensive and painstaking review, I am calling for cuts totaling over 60 million dollars.

Since becoming governor in 1993, I have proposed cutting over 275 million dollars in unnecessary spending and have redirected those funds toward high priority areas such as education and fighting crime.

And for the second year in a row, my budget includes a reduction in the total number of state employees.

This reduction is made possible by increasing productivity through investments in technology and by privatizing some government functions.

Financial World is right.

When it comes to fiscal responsibility, Missouri is among the nation’s leaders.

We have very low debt — and we will pay off some of the debt we do have with this budget.

We have a Triple-A bond rating from all three major rating agencies.

We have lower state taxes than at least 44 other states.

And now, we are preparing to give Missourians a much greater voice in future tax decisions.

With your approval, I have put on the ballot this coming April, the tax limitation amendment proposed jointly by my office and the Missouri Farm Bureau.

Our proposed amendment will keep taxes down by requiring that all major tax increases be submitted to a vote of the people.

I encourage you once more to actively support this simple and common-sense tax limitation plan.

It will give Missourians the final say on all major tax decisions.

When you combine the strength of Missouri’s economy, our dedication to fiscal responsibility, and our commitment to innovation, we get a recipe for some powerful results.

For example, over the past three years, we have concentrated a great deal of effort on reforming welfare in Missouri.

We’ve overhauled the program and made innovative changes to help welfare recipients get off welfare, move into private sector jobs, and become self-sufficient.



As a result of our welfare reform initiatives and our strong economy, the number of people on AFDC, the state's major welfare program, has declined by about 26,000 over the past two years.

This is real reform and real progress which will pay long-term dividends for Missouri families and taxpayers.

And now, our recipe for success is making it possible for us to cut taxes.

I am proposing a permanent quarter-cent cut in Missouri's sales tax — the first sales tax cut in the history of the state.

In addition to this sales tax cut, there will also be a tax refund for 1996.

This is over and above the tax refund I announced in 1995.

The combination of Missouri's strong economic growth and our commitment to fiscal responsibility make these tax cuts affordable, and in fact, necessary to meet our responsibilities under Missouri's revenue limit.

PAY PLAN

To deliver high quality services to taxpayers, the state must be able to compete for qualified and efficient employees.

However, state employee salaries have not kept pace with inflation and remain on the average 20 percent below market rates for comparable jobs.

This wide disparity between our pay scale and the private sector pay scale continues to make it difficult for our state to recruit and retain qualified employees in many job classes.

To help remedy this problem and assist state employees in keeping up with inflation, I am proposing a salary increase of two percent for state employees plus marketplace salary increases for successful employees as recommended by the Commission on Management and Productivity.

Under my proposal, state employees will receive an average increase of 5.8 percent.

FEDERAL BUDGET CUT PREPARATION

As we all know, the best laid plans may be affected by decisions made a thousand miles away in Washington.

No state in the Union will be able to address all the unmet needs, if the more radical Congressional budget plans are implemented over the next months and years.

We continue to wait for Washington to make decisions which will have a great impact here in Missouri.

We do not know the outcome of those decisions yet, but there are some prudent steps which we can and must take to prepare for the dramatic changes in federal fiscal policy that may soon unfold.



To help us meet the challenges ahead, I will appoint a commission to help us assess the effect of these impending changes.

This commission will obtain vital input from our local communities, citizens, and Missouri businesses.

It will develop policy options and make recommendations to us about how state government can best restructure to meet the challenges and take advantage of any opportunities coming from Washington.

Second, we will build a substantial reserve in the rainy day fund.

My recommendations include increasing this fund to 115 million dollars, or about two and one-half percent of general revenue collections.

The rainy day fund will give us the flexibility to deal effectively with the economic effects of federal policy changes.

Third, I propose increasing the reserve funds we count on to deal with emergencies, federal contingencies, and economic downturns.

Next, we must continue to keep Missouri a low debt state.

This year, we will use significant one-time resources to retire high-interest state debt.

This action will save Missouri taxpayers tens of millions in long-term interest costs.

All of these steps are essential if we are to be ready for the changes that are coming from Washington.

I'd like to point out that Washington could learn a lesson from the Missouri General Assembly in responsible budgeting.

Under the capable leadership of Senator Lybyer and Representative Lumpe, you pass responsible balanced budgets, and you pass them on time.

CONCLUSION

I know I have placed a lot on your plate.

But working together we have been able to accomplish a lot during the past three years — and we can do it again.

I also know that each of you in this body — Democrat and Republican, rural and urban, young and old — share a common goal, if not always a common path.

That goal is our state motto — "Let the welfare of the people be the supreme law."

This is the cause that bonds us together, and the one that I hope will direct our course during the months ahead.

Missouri has energy, talent, and an innovative spirit that we haven't even begun to tap.

Let's use them now to build a Missouri legacy that Kendra Davis and all the other children of this state will be proud to inherit.

Kendra, I promise you we will do our best to live up to your expectations.

STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS
GOVERNOR MEL CARNAHAN

We want Missouri to continue to be a state where you, like thousands of other young Missourians, can stay healthy, get a good education, find a good job, and some day, if you choose, raise a family of your own.

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